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For Immediate Release

September 15, 2005

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## \*\*\* MACKINAC BRIDGE TAKEOVER UPDATE \*\*\*

*Sen. Allen makes statement on Senate floor regarding  
Mackinac Bridge takeover*

**Who:** State Sen. Jason Allen, R-Traverse City.

**What:** Allen made a statement on the Senate floor today to make fellow members of the Legislature aware of the Michigan Department of Transportation's takeover of the Mackinac Bridge.

Please see attached.

**Briefing:** Allen held a town hall meeting in St. Ignace earlier this month following Michigan Department of Transportation Director Gloria Jeff's announcement she is taking away the decades-long responsibilities of the Mackinac Bridge Authority based on her interpretation of attorney general opinions from the 1960s. Conflicting statements have been given by the administration and Jeff.

On several occasions, Allen has requested the governor's assistance in restoring the historical functions of the Mackinac Bridge Authority. To date, there have been reports of a tentative agreement between the governor and the MBA. No formal action has been taken.

Allen intends to introduce legislation to restore the Mackinac Bridge Authority's ability to operate and manage the bridge.

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Thank you Mr. President. Today I would like to bring your attention to a situation that has been developing in my district regarding the oversight of the Mackinac Bridge.

As you know, the Mackinac Bridge serves as a vital link between our two peninsulas. It establishes an economic link, which fuels the industries of the Upper Peninsula; be it tourism, forestry, manufacturing or others. Equally important is the symbolic link which it serves, bridging the geographic gap between our two peninsulas. The Mackinac Bridge truly is jewel of our transportation system and one of the main symbols of our state.

For over half a century, the various appointed members of the Mackinac Bridge Authority and Authority staff have worked tirelessly to ensure the vitality of the Mackinac Bridge. Over the past 50 plus years, the Mackinac Bridge Authority has worked in collaboration with the Department of Transportation and its predecessors to maintain and promote one of Michigan's greatest treasures. The fact that the Mackinac Bridge remains in excellent structural and operational condition is a testament to the hard work of all of the Authority members – past and present – and the dedicated employees who support and maintain the bridge.

However, I am extremely concerned about the recent decisions made by the Director of the Department of Transportation with respect to the oversight and management of the Mackinac Bridge.

I am concerned that MDOT has removed the Authority's ability to make decisions about providing insurance and planning maintenance for the bridge. Equally distressing was MDOT's decision to take \$25 million from the Bridge Authority that had previously been managed by a private company, and placed with the state treasury in Lansing.

Upon learning of the decisions made by the Director, I along with members of the House of Representatives sent the governor a letter dated August 31, 2005 requesting her assistance in resolving what many viewed as a clear power grab by a member of her administration. While I appreciate comments made in the media that the governor is not interested in a Lansing take over of the bridge, no actual action was taken by the governor to rectify this concern.

(MORE)

On September 1, 2005, I convened a town hall meeting in St. Ignace in an effort to give the Director the opportunity to explain her actions to Straits area residents; my constituents. I was pleased to hear the Director state in her opening comments that she, along with the governor, was not interested in taking over the powers of the Mackinac Bridge. However, that pleasure was short lived. The Director then gave a lengthy presentation to the standing room only crowd, which specifically outlined how and why MDOT was taking over all of the Bridge Authority's functions, with the exception of setting tolls and managing special events.

This transgression against a great institution such as the bridge cannot remain unchecked.

Following the town hall meeting two weeks ago, I drafted another letter to the governor asking her to clarify the conflicting statements coming from her administration and again asking for her assistance in resolving this problem in my district. To date, I have not received a response to this letter either, nor seen any specific action by the governor.

More recently, I read a media account which briefly described an agreement that the governor may be to restore the powers of the Mackinac Bridge Authority. Again, talk of an agreement, but as of yet no tangible action.

The words of the MDOT Director and the governor have been specific; there is no interest in a Lansing takeover of the Bridge's functions. However the actions of MDOT have clearly shown otherwise and actions speak louder than words.

When asked about her knowledge of MDOT's actions in this matter in an article printed over the weekend, the governor was quoted as saying, "I found about this last week." I fully believe the governor had no knowledge of what the head of the Michigan Department of Transportation was doing. However, as chief executive of the state of Michigan, she is ultimately responsible for the actions of her cabinet members.

I am pleased that she appears to be willing to resolve this problem and speaks of restoring the bridge authority to its traditional role. I hope that she keeps her word and rescinds this Lansing power grab. Should the governor act to remedy this situation, I look forward to being provided a copy of the agreement and I hope that it will clearly outline the reinstatement of the Mackinac Bridge Authority's powers.

While I am hopeful that the governor will take steps to resolve this issue in the short term, recent actions clearly show a need for a statutory clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the Mackinac Bridge Authority. I intend to take the necessary actions to protect the long term viability of the bridge, which I believe is best served by the Mackinac Bridge Authority; as that authority has existed and practiced for over half a century. As always, my door is open to the governor, should she wish to work with me in a bi-partisan effort to resolve this issue. Unfortunately, to date I have received no official response from the governor on this important issue to the citizens of northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula.

Thank you. I ask that my remarks be printed in the journal.

